

TESTIMONY OF GREATER YELLOWSTONE COALITION ON HB 484
FEBRUARY 19, 2013

Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee. I am Jeanne-Marie Souvigney, here on behalf of Greater Yellowstone Coalition.

GYC has been involved with the challenge of YNP bison management for well over 20 years. We communicated with federal and state agencies throughout the ten years leading up to the adoption of the IBMP in 2000 by three federal and two state agencies.

We're not clear on what this bill will actually do but want to raise three areas of concerns:
Does the bill eliminate the IBMP, which was negotiated after several years discussion among federal and state agencies and was subject to many public hearings and extensive public comment? The bill strikes the language about a plan approved by the governor on page 3, line 13 but keeps that same language page 1, line 17.

If the IBMP is no longer valid, what is the process for adopting a new plan and under what plan will the state and federal agencies be operating in the meantime?

I would also like to call your attention to a process that occurred in 2011 under which a diverse group of citizens came together in monthly meetings for almost a year to provide consensus recommendations to the IBMP partners about management of Yellowstone bison. Participation in the group was open to any interested person and ultimately involved sportsmen, local citizens and landowners, livestock producers, and wildlife conservation interests. GYC participated in that process. The recommendations focused on disease transmission risk reduction, bison population management and bison habitat needs. Those consensus recommendations suggested greater tolerance for bison outside the park, not eliminating tolerance as this bill would do and it asked for. I have a copy of those recommendations for the committee.

Our second concern is how a hunt will occur under HB 484. Language on the first page changes a 'may' to a 'shall', thus removing any discretion by the agencies in managing bison except by removal so that the two state agencies would face mandatory duties to remove or kill any bison that cross the park boundary. It's not clear how public or tribal hunting would occur under those circumstances.

Finally, we are unclear whether the change in subsection (5), starting on page 3, line 29, changes the intent of the language adopted through SB 212 from the 2011 session to apply to migrating YNP bison. Our interpretation of the discussions that surrounded SB 212, and a finding from a District Court judge last month who reviewed the tapes of the hearings and floor sessions, are that SB 212 addressed translocated bison, not bison migrating from YNP.

Does the inserted language about bison that are allowed to migrate refer to translocated bison that leave lands to which they have been moved or does it mean that the legislature is changing the intent of SB 212 to now apply to YNP bison? That would mean that all the provisions of subsection 3 would in effect replace the IBMP negotiated by federal and state agencies more than ten years ago and we oppose that change.

For these reasons, we ask that you reject HB ~~484~~.

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